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Kristallnacht

"Hero Memorial Day," which these glorious gangsters celebrate, started for us Jews as every other day. It was a day which was impossible to ignore without having seen it. These are days with flags, early morning assemblies of the S.A. and S.S. in early morning, with everyone bragging in fullest uniform, that he is a "comrade of conviction"; when youth marches through the town with kettle drums and trumpets, and the S.A. sings their own "beautiful" song: "Line the Jews, line the Barbarian gangsters against the wall." This is not the time to appear on the street without ones party sign [swastika]. No one in Germany, unless he was part of the closest Goebbels Circle, thought that these marches could become the beginning of so much misery and the beginning of brutal madness.

As on every other Wednesday evening, my little daughter left for her sewing lessons, and without much anxiety we looked forward to her return. At 9 P.M. the S.A. marched, at 10 P.M. the S.A. marched. Now it is 11 P.M., the S.A. is still marching and Ruth is still not at home. Finally, at 11:30 she arrives, totally distraught with this message: the entire city swarms with S.A. and S.S. and the grapevine has it (learned through the workers of the Rhinemetal works, who are on the streets) that tomorrow every 7th Jew shall be shot. This in retaliation for the murder in Paris committed by Herschel Grynszpan.

But who believed such rumors in Germany, a land where everything is rumored and Truth is no longer existing? And if they come to pick me up and shoot me tomorrow morning -- what can I do about it? Shall I flee tonight, leaving everything behind, without passport, without possessions and depending upon the charity of strange people? And is it at all possible with wife and two children to cross the border on the black market? Until now, the fate of those who tried and were captured, has been wretched. No, I cannot dare to do it, especially since we expect daily the invitation to come to Stuttgart to the U.S. Consulate, to legally

emigrate into the U.S.. Was our decision right or wrong? We will never learn the answer. The time of pain and suffering only just began.

The night passed quietly for us, though for many it brought death and eternal grief and sorrow. For us, it happened the next day at 7 A.M., when our friends, the Emmerichs, called to ask if we had had "visitors" and "how are things going?"

We viewed this question to be incomprehensible, but no further information was obtainable. Our first thoughts were that something terrible happened to our friends. Get dressed and look after them. Shortly thereafter, a second call brought us the full veracity.

A lady, whose financial affairs were under my administration, asked me to come to her immediately. During the night, her entire apartment had been destroyed by the S.A..

Now, similar reports were coming in from all sides. It is unintelligible that we should have been spared.

Mutti, in anticipation of happenings and also remembering what had been reported by the workers of Rheinmetal, did not allow me to go out into the street. She undertook the difficult task to look after our friends and to try and administer justice on their behalf. But all was in order at Emmerichs.

At 12 o'clock midnight, the S.A. came, looked around and left. The leader of the gang saw on his list that we were to emigrate to the U.S. in the next days.

But it was different with other friends, such as a young widow with a small son of 5 years. Terror stricken over the sight of that apartment, Mutti came home. Everything destroyed, furniture hacked up, all glass and porcelain smashed, the entire place a pile of ruins. No rational person can imagine such barbarism.

We gathered with the Emmerichs and the other Jewish homeowners to deliberate how to prepare for the coming night. That the pillage should continue during daylight hours in a legal state no one dreamed.

Our corner where we lived was fortuitously overlooked during

the night. In the morning hours, we became aware of all the details of this barbarous night: after completion of the official directions, certain chosen teams of the S.A. and other mobs were invited by their leaders to join them in a "gemeutlich" drinking feast. These low people did the job willingly, with free beer and the pay of 1.50 RM per hour. These troops moved into exactly designated districts with the higher command to destroy everything which belonged to Jews. They went from house to house with previously accurately prepared lists. Special divisions moved against the synagogues to plunder that which we consider our holiest, to plunder, to soil, to destroy and to loot. They started the fires rapidly.

The most horrible and shameful scenes were happening. And this by a people who, at the same time, had endowed a "culture" prize of 10,000 DM on such activity. Rude urchins destroyed the interiors of the synagogue, the holy books, the Torah scrolls were dismembered in triumph in front and inside the synagogue. Several tried with all their strength to swing from the great chandeliers in order to cause them to fall. All was done only to destroy.

As ordered, the police stood by without interfering, barring the scene so that no uncalled person should come to help. The fire department limited itself to protecting the surrounding houses, so that the "Jew fire" should not damage Aryan houses. Restless, to the foundation walls, the synagogue had to burn down, so that on the next day the pickaxes could end the horrible deeds more easily.

The burning of the synagogues was the emergence of the plundering of the hordes, who, up to 12 midnight forced themselves into the Jewish homes in order to destroy and sack.

These gangs ransacked all homes, treated all in the most mean and vulgar way and imprisoned all Jewish men to "protect them from the ill treatment of the excited masses." Most brutal violence! The groaning of the beaten and dying, screaming women and children showed the way which the apocalyptic riders took. Men who tried to resist this terror, were murdered before the eyes of their wives. Who can defend themselves against these armed Bandits, who attacked helpless people with rubber mallets and guns.

These Beasts wanted to see blood, and they saw it plentiful!

Many, who survived this severe treatment and who were not imprisoned, fled during this same night across the border to Holland, only with the clothes on their backs. And here happened the single most unique part of the history of the Third Reich: the borders were open! Jews were able to cross the borders without passports! There was no customs official to stop the illegal exodus. And the Dutch made no difficulties whatsoever. In one night, during one hour, all border passages had been opened for the fleeing Jews! While hundreds and hundreds of Jews fled from the Rhineland and surrounding areas of Germany, this night brought the most frightfully cruel deeds, reminiscent of the black middle ages in Germany. These brutish inhumane hordes moved further and further, destroying everything and mistreating everyone. We, who were spared on this night, discussed what to do and where to flee, and we decided to remain in our home.

During the night, we thought of going to our friends, as it was unimaginable that the gangs would plunder a third time through the existing ruins. Finally, at 10 A.M. Ruth returned from school; she had left in the early morning, as she did every day. The teacher felt correctly that the children on this day should better be at home. But Bub was still missing.

At 11 A.M. we received a call from an attorney with whom we were on friendly terms [Lotte Juchacz]. Without name, without commentary, only five significant words: "leave your place at once!" That's when we knew that the vandalism was continuing through the day. What to do? What to take? Where to go? Those were the questions which suddenly and with critical reality fell upon us. We quickly packed a small hand bag with the most necessary utensils for the night. In one briefcase our two silver candleholders, in another briefcase our emigration documents, hidden cash, and then -- out of this house and onto the street -- to the corner where we could oversee the divergence of four streets, so that we might have time to flee before the rabble approaches. But, nothing happened. As it does daily, the traffic rolled along the street. No

uniform was to be seen.

Finally, Bub arrived, good naturedly as always. In his youth, he did not feel the urgency and terrible seriousness of the situation, which could rob us of everything we owned, which could bring death and misery.

Two times I returned to our home to survey its contents with heavy heart. Pitiful was the picture, as shortly after us, other Jewish tenants, whom I had warned, left their respective apartments in other directions, to find lodging with friends and acquaintance. Now that I had my loved ones around me, came the question: where to? What to do? It was impossible that we four, with our small dog Mucki, could stay together. But how to separate, to find security for the children, as each second was precious and irretrievable. No one whom we met was known to us, despairing we stand on the street.

Really, "when the need is greatest, G-d is closest." Suddenly, a Christian lady approached us.⁹⁶ We did not dare greet her on the open street. "What happened to you? I come right now from the City. Dreadful, this destruction, these plundering hordes, those destroyed homes." Without hesitation, she immediately offered to take the children into her home, as in her Aryan house there would be no danger. Of course, we accepted this offer with pleasure as it appeared presently to be the best and most favorable opportunity for the children. We arranged that they should not react to phone calls or letters, but that we, personally, would fetch them. Thus we thought we had best cared for them. We also thought that they could manage the few steps back to our apartment without being observed.

We hoped that the children were secure and decided to go separately to our friend Lotte Juchacz, for her counsel as to what to do next. Unmolested, we arrived at her office in Oberkassel. Walking through the city, our route passed burnt out apartments,

⁹⁶ She was the wife of the architect Huhn, who lived in the building that we were evicted from 2 years earlier.

destroyed single family homes, with the entire furnishings on the street, burning. At the Koenigsplatz, a married couple was searching through the ruins in front of their home in order to extract the few usable items. Laughing, they dug through the rubbish. The terrible events played out during earlier hours robbed them of their minds and clear consciousness. On and on -- gaping urchins stood over them, making sneering remarks.

Many people passed with abhorrence toward this "Civilization Decline." Lotte Juchacz, who with her own eyes saw these brown hordes, told us of many more details. The three of us -- Mucki got the rest -- ate a plate of soup, to brace us for this horrible day. We agreed that we would send our housekeeper Anni into the apartment to fetch a few things and that we would spend the night on a moving train, bringing us to any destination. Just to leave this city, whose stone walls were pregnant with the air of destruction, blood and death. We still did not know if this was an isolated action or had been commanded throughout Germany. The early morning call to Frankfurt a/m was reassuring. All was in order. At 3 o'clock I had planned to meet Anni at the house. Mutti was to follow. I did not dare to park the car at the house and so I stopped at the next corner. When I turned the corner, I knew that it was too late for us, that nothing could be saved. Before the house of our neighbor lay our furniture, my files, everything lay on the street: our beds, our books, everything that we cherished and nursed was destroyed. When I met Anni, she had a weeping spell on the open street. She had been at our place before me.

The torn curtains hung on the windows, which had been smashed and the door to the apartment had been demolished. Inside greeted me a picture of destruction and waste which I will never forget. During my military stint in France, I saw much devastation. Houses and apartments that were destroyed by shell fire, burning, charred and scattered property, but such a picture of barbaric annihilation in the depth of peace, I have never seen.

The War and life have made me immune against the loss of things which can be replaced, but the sight which offered itself to

my eyes -- all porcelain, all crystal, everything gone -- it stopped my heart. All destroyed, furniture overthrown, our bedroom pieces laying in the garden, bookcases ripped out of the wall, our paintings battered, our carpets with knives cut up, the bronze sculpture spilled with acid, the laundry sprayed with iodine, the heavy furniture pieces battered with an axe. The entire interior, which had been put together with love and care was demolished and a pile of ruins. Mutti was heroic vis-a-vis this sight of destruction -- a sight which destroyed everything which we had collected and owned.

We comforted each other through the consolation that at least we lived and we were healthy and escaped this terrible fate. I wanted, I could not spare the children from this terrible sight. They should see how low a country -- which brought forth Goethe, Kant and Beethoven -- could sink under the influence of the Nazis. They should learn from this misanthropy. Here, among the things they loved, they should see how low man can sink, how easy it is to seduce people through lies. A country of poets and thinkers, and today a land of ruins and barbarians. A people who can stand quietly by this disgrace, a people who can watch this devastation with their own eyes, without even a red face.

During the evening, one read in the newspaper: "the conceivable indignation over the murder of von Rath excited the populace and some windowpanes of a few Jewish stores were damaged." Lies of Goebbels, an affront to the people, because it was not the populace, but it was dispatched and paid S.A. gangs which set this scene into motion. All this did not destroy our will to live and to build a new future for our children!

After we survived the first terrible impression, we tried to bring some order into this chaos and beat a path through the ruins. Perhaps we could save this or that.

Now, I prepared to get the children, for them to help and to see what these hordes accomplished. I decided to go at the break of darkness. As I came to this acquaintance, no one was home; not a soul to be found. Those were terrible hours until we learned what happened. What worth were broken furniture pieces, the loss of

material property, if our children were no longer at the place we thought to be safe. Finally we learned what happened: As the lady entered her house, she was seen by a man who had nothing better to do than to immediately report her to the District Administration. "If you should be looking for two Jew-children, they are hiding at Frau Huhn's. Go and fetch them at once." The Commandant decided that as soon as a crew was free, a house search was planned, the children to be collected and the couple to be rendered accountable. Luckily, this was overheard by a garage employee who was standing nearby, who knew me and our children. He had been servicing my car for the past three years. He immediately called from another station and advised Frau Huhns to escort the children out of her house at once. She decided to bring them to a like-minded family in Duisburg. On the way, both children started to cry: "We don't want to leave." That was all they could say. Luckily, Charlie had 10 pfenning in his pocket, as he had sold a school copy book that morning. And so they could call other Jewish acquaintances to perhaps find lodging there.

On the stroke of 5 P.M., when the storm on property finally ceased, all in Germany is well regulated, we felt safe in our own place. It is peculiar -- although everything is secret in Germany -- and nothing is printed in the newspapers, one still comes to know all. At 5:30, we and all people in the city, knew that the action was ended and no one needed to fear further destruction. All was clandestine, nothing was commanded.

After long, long hours, we finally came to know where and how the children ended up. Slowly, after night fall one after the other, our old Christian friends appeared, to see and to help as far as they could in their limited power. They brought food and Frau Gruters brought a teapot as substitute for the destroyed one, which, like our crystal [Val St. Lambert] lay in ruins.

The fact that during that night and following day hundreds of Jews were arrested, we came to know during the course of the day. I already thought of myself as being spared this fate, as we viewed this pogrom as being finished. I exulted too soon, not having the

slightest notion what stood ahead of me.

Our unfamiliar neighbors supported us energetically to bring part of the bedroom furniture, though heavily damaged, out of the garden and back into the apartment. Proof that there are still decent people who want to help Jews. We spent the evening with Emmerichs and there, our children, remained during the night. Then we returned to our home -- if one can call four empty walls, a wide open entry, no windows, home, during those November days.

Thursday and Friday was spent to bring more or less a little order into the house, that we called our "home." We cleared out laundry baskets with glass and porcelain fragments [Limoge]. Up to the ceiling was piled the battered wood which once was our furniture. Another pile of rags showed what were once our linen and fittings [hand laced and hand embroidered]. Heaps of paper and torn books were proof of the annihilation of my library and business files. The bookcases were simply torn from the walls, overthrown and trampled. Chairs without legs, tables and chests totally destroyed and valuable paintings cut to pieces. The chandeliers lay on the floor. Hammers were thrown against the vitrines and their valuable contents [Meissen and Nymphenburg figurines] broken to pieces. Our heavy bronze sculptures were stained with acid, lifted from their pedestals and then dropped to the floor, leaving deep depressions. As mentioned before, our bedroom fittings were thrown through the windows into the garden below. No plate, no cup -- nothing was spared, absolutely nothing was usable.

And then came this evil Saturday, the 11th of November, 1938. Tired and exhausted by the events, Mieke was still resting on the floor at 8:30 in our improvised bed; I decided to take our little dog onto the street.

A gentleman came toward me and asked, "are you Herr Adler?" After my affirmative reply, he commanded me to bring the dog home and to come with him as I was arrested: Gestapo! This man looked quite harmless, like hundreds of others, but he was a

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member of the most frightful and most dangerous organization. Together we returned to my house, Kaiserwertherstrasse 70. I explained to him that I had a date for the following Monday in the Ludwigsburg Court, at which I had to appear under all circumstances. Furthermore, I was just before my emigration to U.S.A.. Therefore there is no reason to detain me: this apprehension would tie up both. He refused to call his superior. Meanwhile, I informed Mieke of the terrible blow. She reacted with a fit of crying and at the same time addressed the functionary with true words of her opinion ----. Perhaps he was softened by the terrible sight of our living quarters, or the result of Mieke's aggressive action -- I will never know. At any rate, he allowed me to get dressed properly and have breakfast. He then dictated a wire to the U.S. consulate in Stuttgart that my emigration was to be speeded up. Today, when one looks back on the actions of the Gestapo, this feeling of decency is almost unbelievable. Then we took off to the police station.

After concluding the admittance process and other formalities and the delivery of all objects in my pockets, I was brought into the cellar, where already about 40 fellow believers had preceded me. This was an underground space with 4 tiny, grated windows near the ceiling. About 5 meters wide, 15 meters long. An open W.C., a few old straw mats, old, frayed blankets -- that was the only furnishing. There I met good old friends, who -- like myself -- on the street, in their homes, or wherever they found themselves -- were led away. Sometimes arrested through lists, sometimes at random: The Gestapo officials stopped passers by with the question: "Are you Jewish?" When they received an affirmative reply, they apprehended the person. Everyone knows that these Gestapo functionaries have all in their power and that it is suicidal to defend oneself against them or offer resistance. They are acting according to Goerring's edict: "Shoot first and then proclaim the reason." If one obeys, one has at least the possibility -- though small -- perhaps to be released. With the police, sometimes one can talk, with the Gestapo, never. They are inaccessible.

We discovered this in the Police prison from Saturday early to Sunday early. The Police officers were decent and no deeds were provoked. As pertains to lodging and maintenance, the guards were not to blame.

Sunday, before noon, the same Gestapo functionary came to fetch me, to travel with me to the Court summons in Ludwigsburg. I received back in the guard house all of my belongings. As a small gesture, I was allowed to call Mieke and to tell her that I was well and I was now leaving for the summons. Not a word more.

Surprisingly, the Gestapo had obtained the tickets, paid for them without asking me for money. During the trip I had occasion to fall into conversation with the official, to bring him to certain topics, to ask him he was in front combat and what he experienced. And then it turned out that during the years that I fought in the hell of Verdun, in the 1st trenches as an advanced artillery observer at "Hoeh 304," he had a job way back from the front. Of course, it is much simpler and surer to attack innocent citizens than to lie in the furthest front trenches. I made this very clear to him, I made no bones about it.

I don't know if this caused him to have more respect for me, or what ever it was I never learned it. In any case, he became more decent toward me and after we arrived in Ludwigsburg, he let me have a meal in a restaurant. But, he did redeliver me to the prison. That was his command. There, I was treated with a certain dignity; I was allowed to remain dressed and retain my things. I was given a single cell, so not to have to mingle with the other prisoners for the night."⁹⁷

⁹⁷ Prior to the time that the diary was translated by Ruth Schnee, Papi described the same events for a prior draft of this book. Because the initial rendition contains additional details of a portion of the events, it is reproduced here:

"After my arrest, I was brought to the Duesseldorf prison. I gave my Ludwigsburg subpoena to the SS guard and told him I had to be present at the requisite time and date. To my astonishment, on the day before the

I delayed one week before continuing with this account of my arrival and stay at the concentration camp Dachau, but I must say I am still unable to do this, because the memory of these days is so exciting [stressful] that I better skip this at the moment.

In all the 50-plus years between the Pogrom night and today, I could not understand how Mieke could manage everything. [REDACTED]

court date, a Gestapo man came to pick me up and to bring me to Ludwigsburg. There were single acts of terror against Jewish people on the street, attacks and assaults without any reason, but I had the protection of the Gestapo, the best security I could find. Travel expenses, costs of room and board, a single room, were paid by the government. I was brought to the prison in Ludwigsburg. The next day, the court day, I was without a lawyer because he had been arrested, as had all other Jewish men in town. The prosecutor proposed three months prison for me for helping a Jew commit a foreign money offense and tax evasion. She was found guilty of a foreign money offense and tax evasion, which resulted in the confiscation of all the money in her name in Germany, but she was found not guilty for an offense related to the mortgage sale. I had to defend myself by telling the court my military experience and that the proceeds of the mortgage never were intended to cross the border illegally, because they were deposited with the notary in Duesseldorf and nobody could touch them. The judge accepted my defense and dismissed the accusation against me. The Gestapo man congratulated me, saying that he had never expected this from a Jew. We had lunch and then we travelled back to the Duesseldorf prison to join the other Jewish prisoners. Two days later we all were transported, destination unknown. But we soon found out that it was to Dachau, the frightful, terrible concentration camp, the teaching place for sadism and slow death."

Papi mentioned another account of the same events that appeared in the magazine "Geschichte Im Westen" (History in the West) 1987 #2, Rheinland Verlag Koeln. This account was by the Duesseldorfer Rabbi Eschelbacher who also described the 10th of November 1938 with all its horrible cruelties in the streets and prison.

[REDACTED]